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ABSTRACT

This paper explores the fatherhood experiences of young Chicanos from the perspective of a social insider, from the same ethnic background and neighborhood. This vantage point places the issue of teenage fatherhood for Chicanos within the context of contemporary urban culture as well as within the structural challenges that many minority and poor youth face in our shifting economy. The study draws on a conceptual framework called "generative fathering" or "fatherwork"--the work that most men do to meet the needs of their children and the next generation. Extensive, in-depth interviews were carried out with seven Chicano teen fathers, or Chicanos who had fathered children in their teens, who were known to be actively involved with their children, as well as with a few teen mothers, other family members, and youth advocates knowledgeable about the issues. Four major themes emerged during interviews: (1) masculinity and fathering in spite of the bad example of one's own father; (2) taking responsibility for one's obligations, and the ways that sense of responsibility was conveyed to young men by strong mothers and grandmothers; (3) competing interests between families and children; and (4) creative strategies of exploiting local resources to provide for families ("hustling"). (Contains 67 references.) (SV)

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Fatherwork in the Crossfire: Chicano Teen Fathers Struggling to "Take Care of Business"

by Rudy Hernendez
Director, Undergraduate Diversity,
College of Agriculture and Natural Resources, MSU

Working Paper No. 58
November 2002

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About the Author: *Rudy Hernandez*

Rudy G. Hernandez was born and raised in Detroit, Mich., where he completed his undergraduate studies at Wayne State University. Currently, he is a Ph.D. candidate in MSU's Department of Sociology. His focus of study is primarily on Latino youth and family issues. Professionally, he has worked several years with youth throughout Michigan and is currently the Director for Undergraduate Diversity in the College of Agriculture and Natural Resources at MSU.

MICHIGAN STATE
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Fatherwork in the Crossfire:

Chicano Teen Fathers Struggling to "Take Care of Business"

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Fatherwork in the Crossfire: Chicano Teen Fathers Struggling to "Take Care of Business"

Introduction

Increased divorce rates and out-of-wedlock births have precipitated much national conversation about the well-being of children raised in single family households. Commonly evoked is the image of a single mother who is struggling to raise children without the help of her children's biological father, or a "deadbeat dad." However, realistically, she has a good chance of remarrying a man whose ex-wife and children are being primarily supported and raised by yet another man (Coleman, Ganong & Fine, 2000). If the mother is poor and young, the image quickly becomes that of a Black or brown woman who is perpetuating her condition by irresponsibly becoming pregnant repeatedly, by multiple men, most often in her teens, without regard or need for establishing a traditional family; she is replacing familial support: economic, social, emotional and psychological, with that of the state. The Black or brown father(s) are seen as irresponsible, incorrigible, highly oversexed, sometimes depraved, boys or men who derive their self worth from irresponsibly fathering as many children as possible and who have no regard for society's existing mores for civility.

Until recently, most of the academic literature pertaining to Latino families has primarily only included Mexican American communities and has failed to recognize the important effects that variables such as socioeconomic status, immigration generation and nativity have on shaping family experiences (Massey, Zambrana & Bell, 1995). Yet earlier studies that underanalyze structural, cultural, regional and ethnic differences within Latino communities are applied with a broad stroke to describe Latino family experiences across the board; unfortunately, they have created an essentializing effect. Consequently, the simplistic cultural clichés that they have generated, whether positive or negative, are not very useful in understanding contemporary Latino youth or families. Furthermore, very little research deals with the family lives of minority males, especially Latinos in the Midwest. This work attempts to add to the revisionist scholarship that Maxine Baca Zinn (1995: pp. 179) describes as having "reshaped our thinking of Latino Families." Here, I explore fatherhood experiences of young Chicanos from the perspective of a social insider — from the same ethnic background and neighborhood. From this vantage point, I hope to place the issue of teenage fatherhood for Chicanos within the context of contemporary urban culture as well as within structural challenges that many minority and poor youth face in our shifting economy.

The study of teen childbearing/rearing has been largely motivated by the desire to establish correlation and causation with success and failure of young mothers and their children, the people whose lives are believed to be most affected by it. Furthermore, there is no shortage of literature pertaining to teen pregnancy/childbearing that focuses on young women, although considerably less that focuses on Chicanas and/or Latinas, and even smaller amounts that focus on adolescent Chicano fathers. There is, however, a growing interest in the subject of adolescent fatherhood. But, compared with our knowledge of teen mothers, there is very little literature available that offers little more than demographic data or anecdotal accounts (Allen & Doherty, 1996). Scholars who study teen childbearing most often attribute teen fathers' absence in the literature to poor birth record tracking methods, to trouble in recruiting subjects for studies because of the stigma associated with negative stereotypes, and to fatherhood denial or noninvolvement (Allen & Doherty, 1996. Elaine Bell Kaplan, 1997: pp. 22), who studied teenage Black mothers in northern California, found it impossible to include fathers in a meaningful way in her study because "[s]adly, most of the teen mothers' fathers and their babies' fathers [in her study] were not involved in their lives in any significant way."

However, I do not believe young fathers to be absent from the literature because they are invisible in the teen childbearing/rearing discussion. Rather, their absence is a reflection of scholarly theorizing about fatherhood that has been closely tethered to mainstream ideals and norms, which offers little room for understanding how young men, particularly young men of color, do fathering outside the context of middle-class, heterosexual marriage or after its dissolution.

Certainly Chicano teen fathers face incredible challenges. The intersection of youth and poverty is a particularly precarious place to be. Add to that the social and economic disadvantage related to immigrant status, segregation, racism, substandard education and the restructuring of our economy. Further saddle many of these youths with the cultural and structural forces that obligate them to contribute to the maintenance and management of their sanguinal families, be the "social cement" on which poor and immigrant families have long depended (Gold, 2000; Stepick, 1998). Now add to this the burden of inventing ways to deal with the superfluous responsibilities of contributing financially, emotionally and temporally to a child with whom he often does not reside. Of course not all Chicano teen fathers are poor, not all are individually as burdened by poverty, racism, etc. The fact is not all even attempt to explore the responsibilities one would assume are inherent to fatherhood. Given the paucity of research in this area, it is impossible to know how many, but some do "step up to take care of business," a term used widely in inner cities to describe those young men who care for their children to varying degrees.

This study is largely informed by a structural analysis that offers contextual meaning to a critical understanding of family systems.[1] However, I employed the concept of "fatherwork," the work most men do to meet the needs of their children and next generation, posed by proponents of the generative fathering framework, which operates under the assumption that young men have a desire to be involved with their children and that they contribute positively to raising their children in many ways that are best understood when viewed in cultural and structural contexts (Hawkins & Dollahite, 1997), as ways to explore how young Chicano fathers perceive fatherhood, how that perception is influential in constructing the meaning of fatherwork, how this fatherwork is tempered by structural and cultural forces, and how it translates into the actual work they do to meet the needs of their, family, children and next generation. Given that these young fathers are also adolescents, who in most cases occupy a semi-dependent position within a larger family unit, I purposefully trained my attention to observe the extent to which Chicano families marshal traditional and cultural values, such as familism, to help mediate the construction of a teen's perception of the meaning of fatherhood juxtaposed to their experiences with being young, poor, urban and Chicano. By no means is this study representative of all young Chicano fathers and their families, but it does augment the few other studies of its kind which add to our knowledge of this vastly understudied population.

Latinos & Teenage Childbearing

Background

Many studies point out that teen childbearing has racialized dimensions and much to do with minority status, lower social positioning, school failure, school dropout and residence in a single-female-headed household (Baca Zinn & Riba, 1999; Erickson, 1998; Romo & Falbo, 1996; Bell Kaplan, 1997; Mauldon, 1998). Among the greatest debates is whether teen pregnancy begets poverty and limits opportunities, or vice versa. While poverty and limited opportunities may, in part, be perpetuated by teen pregnancy, the fact is that 38% of all teens live in poverty and *that* 38% is responsible for 83% of all teen pregnancies (Mauldon, 1998). Studies show that for most poor teens, educational problems, poverty, underemployment and lack of opportunities precede teen pregnancy, and having a baby has little or no bearing on whether or not these adverse conditions change (Baca Zinn & Riba, 1999; Marsiglio, 1986, Romo & Falbo, 1996; Erickson, 1998; Baca Zinn & Eitzen, 1999). If anything, having and caring for a baby may be one of the only things that a teen living in these conditions can control and do successfully (Baca Zinn & Riba, 1999; Raley, 1999; Mauldon, 1998; Fennelly, 1993).

Most literature produced on teen pregnancy for the past decade has centered on the White and Black populations, thereby ignoring the fastest growing segment of the U.S. society — Latino youth (Erickson, 1998; Baca Zinn & Riba, 1999). In fact, the overall numbers of Latino youths have recently eclipsed those of Black youths (Hernandez, Siles & Rochín, 1999), and they exhibit the lowest rates of educational attainment and are poorer than any other minority group (Baca Zinn & Eitzen, 1999. Researchers (Erickson, 1998; Romo & Falbo, 1998; Baca Zinn & Riba, 1999) have reported that Chicana teens are now the most likely of all racial-ethnic groups to give birth. In 1994, Latinas had a 107.7 birthrate per 1000 live births (Baca Zinn & Riba, 1999), compared to 116.2 for African Americans and 42.5 for Whites (Erickson, 1998). When the birthrate for teenage Latinas is divided by individual ethnic categories (e.g., Puerto Rican, Mexican American, Cuban American, etc.), Mexican American teenagers had a live birthrate of 116.2, which really means that Mexican American teenagers, taken by themselves, are the racial/ethnic group most likely to give birth (Baca Zinn & Riba, 1999; Goodyear, Newcomb & Allison, 2000). While it is true that recent data suggests that the national teen birth rate has been in slow decline from 1991 to 2000 for women 15 to 19, reversing a 24% rise between 1986 and 1991, the U.S. retains the distinction of having the highest rates of teen pregnancy and births in the western industrialized world. Moreover, recent trends also indicate that the sharpest decline was reported for Black women, but Latinas showed the smallest decline over this same period (National Campaign to Prevent Teen Pregnancy, 2001). Therefore, despite the recent decline in birthrates for teenage women in general, the gap between birthrates for teenage Latinas and other women is widening, which makes teen childbearing/pregnancy a continuing concern for Latino communities, especially Mexican American communities.

Given that great strides, since the introduction of the "culture of poverty" theories, have been made in broadening our knowledge of structural forces' power to cause poverty and strain families (Sullivan, 1989 and 1993; Baca Zinn & Eitzen, 1999), these trends for Latinas should come as no surprise. Yet most mainstream researchers fail to recognize this (Baca Zinn & Riba, 1999). However, there is a growing body of literature examining both Latina teenage pregnancy and sexual behavior as it pertains to acculturation, education, and poverty (e.g. Erickson, 1998; Romo & Falbo, 1997; Baca Zinn & Riba, 1999). Most of this literature seems to support the notion that cultural norms and values are important factors to consider when studying teenage childbearing (Erickson, 1998; Baca Zinn & Riba, 1999). Even though this literature has made invaluable contributions that have been pivotal to our knowledge about teen childbearing and how it is affecting Latino families, it has offered sparse information regarding the men involved.

Latino Teen Fathers

In general, literature on teen fathers has not been very useful in many ways beyond providing (sketchy) demographic data. What we know is that most teen fathers have a genuine desire to be proactively involved in their children's lives (Rhoden & Robinson, 1997). We also know that despite an overwhelming percentage of teen fathers not residing with their children, they still manage to stay involved with their children in important ways (Danziger & Radin, 1990). Where Latino teen fathers are concerned, it has been shown that despite structural economic factors that severely limit these young men's abilities to provide for their children *in traditional ways*, they have developed complex and creative ways to stay involved with and remain supportive throughout at least portions of their child's life, and these ways are influenced by culture (Sullivan, 1989 and 1993; Marsiglio, 1986; Robinson, 1988; Danziger & Radin, 1990). While there very well may be social pressures in "barrios" for teen fathers to accept responsibility (Cohen, 1999), there is consistent evidence that these pressures are not new. They have been, for a long time, just misunderstood (Mirandé, 1998). Latino scholars who have studied masculinity and manhood have, for many years, taken the stance that being a caring, nurturing father and family man is culturally intertwined with Latino masculinity and is an integral part of familism. Measuring masculinity by how well one provides for the economic and

emotional well being of his family rather than male dominance, sexual prowess and aggression (Mirandé & Enríquez, 1979 as cited in Réyes, 1995; Mirandé, 1998; Réyes, 1995; Mirandé, 1988; Baca Zinn, 1982 as cited in Vega, 1995). Moreover, as the opportunities to earn viable wages in the industries that once supported urban Latino families dwindle, these kinship systems are as important to preserve Latino families, communities and culture as they once were during other times of great transition; from colonizer to colonizer, from agriculture to industry, and from stationary to transitory work (Thornton Dill, 1999).

Families, Youth, Poverty and Gender in the Barrio

The focus of this research is on how young, poor Chicanos do "fatherwork" — to borrow a term from Hawkins and Dollahite (1997). In many ways, the experiences of many young Chicano fathers are shaped by immigration and poverty. Indeed, these issues are intertwined, and the literature pertinent to these areas provides contextual insight into the family experiences of first, second and third generations of Latino youth. Furthermore, this body of literature provides compelling evidence that suggests that children who are poor and/or are part of an immigrant family, regardless of their generational order, become important household agents who facilitate settlement (Fernandez-Kelly, 1995; Valenzuela, 1999; Gold, 2000; Zhou, 1997; Stepick, 1998). Stepick (1998) describes children as the "social cement" that holds families together and aid in settlement. Furthermore, these children assume adult roles at an early age; they act as interpreters, translators, daycare providers, financial consultants, mediators between their families and the outside world (Valenzuela, 1999).

While these "social cement" traits are shown to be intrinsic to childhood experiences in immigrant families, several other studies suggest that in second or third generation Latino families, children serve as the oil that lubricates the mechanisms that maintain and manage families (Sanchez Jankowski, 1991; Vigil, 1988; Moore, 1991; Furstenburg et. al., 1999; Zhou, 1997; Gold, 2000). They take on jobs, whether in the formal market or not, at an early age in order to contribute to their families' collective income, oftentimes at the expense of their education. However, the restructuring of our economy from an industrial base to a service base means that even second-generation youth, who may not have language or other barriers common amongst immigrants, are being excluded from even low-skilled labor (Gans, 1992).

"Neighborhoods are not accidents. They are the products of systematic sorting" (Furstenburg, et. al., 1999: pp. 18).

In the Midwest, where this study takes place, manufacturing and low-skilled jobs are disappearing at an alarmingly rapid rate (Mishel & Bernstein, 1992: as cited in Zhou, 1997). Jobs that require even minimal training are being relocated outside city limits, creating highly concentrated pockets of poverty in inner cities — barrios — where most Latinos live (Zhou, 1997; Furstenburg et. al., 1999). These concentrated, low-income barrios — highly segregated, alienated from the mainstream, virtually denuded of institutional resources and void of viable role-models — have had tremendous social consequences on their inhabitants and play an important role in shaping families and gender relations (Zhou, 1997; Furstenburg et. al., 1999). Moreover, increasing unemployment has seriously decreased the number of marriageable men and consequently there is a rise in female-headed households, even for Latinos (Zhou, 1997). While the point of departure of most studies on contemporary Latino families is their close-knit familial structure and extensive kin networks, they also conclude that these same families are highly flexible, adaptive to their environment and hardly the monolithic, patriarchal institutions that was once the stereotype (Baca Zinn & Eitzen, 1999; Coltrane, 1996; Mirande, 1998). As with most families, Latino families are in constant flux, inventing and reinventing themselves, changing in composition, meaning and function in order to maintain and manage their existence (Baca Zinn, 1995; Gold, 2000).

Increasing unemployment and shriveling opportunities for even poorly paid jobs also have forced many Latino youths to wander in and out of the underground economy in order to contribute to their families' financial stability (Sanchez Jankowski, 1991; Bourgois, 1995). This situation usually conjures the image of a young *Cholo* [Chicano hoodlum] sporting baggy clothes, thick gold chains, tattoos and a wad of cash that could choke a horse. However, nearly all studies of contemporary barrio youth life (read: gang literature) support the notion that young Latino men turn to "street culture," informal — oftentimes illegal — economy, as a means to eke out an existence and earn respect in the absence of many viable opportunities (Sanchez Jankowski, 1991; Vigil, 1988; Moore, 1991; Bourgois, 1995; Anderson, 1999; Furstenburg et. al., 1999, Zhou, 1997). These alternative forms of "getting over" usually mean getting exploited by older men who have them "selling wares" for low pay, working long hours and in dangerous conditions and with the constant risk of imprisonment — hardly the hands-over-fists of cash that the media would lead us to believe is inherent to selling drugs.

In his study of Chicano youth and barrio gangs, Vigil (1988: pp. 37) explains the activities of youth in school and on the streets by pointing out what Merton (1949) previously suggested: "...low-income populations have no or little means to attain goals established by higher-status groups and thus must resort to alternative, often deviant, paths to fulfillment." Unfortunately, these deviant paths are condemned by society to be immoral (Anderson, 1999; Bourgois, 1995; Sanchez Jankowski, 1991). Along this vein, other researchers are quick to point out that the national image that Latino youth have come to represent — one that is immigrant, gang-banging, oversexed, hypermasculined and violently criminal (Moore, 1991). Consequently, being young, brown and poor — maybe not even being poor — constitutes immorality. However, the gang literature also points out that entrepreneurialism amongst Latino youth, whether gang member, loose affiliate, or just a kid temporarily "getting over" in the underground economy, represents an opportunity to achieve a sense of self-competence and of thinking of themselves as capable of economic success, around which their sense of being and masculinity is precariously constructed (Anderson, 1999; Sanchez Jankowski, 1991; Vigil, 1988; Moore, 1991; Bourgois, 1995). If this is true, perhaps there is great reason for these young men, regardless of gang affiliation, to ape the stereotype in order to have more street credibility (Anderson, 1999), which drastically decreases their odds of legitimate employment or educational success. However, given the few venues for legitimate employment, it probably matters little.

When, and if, these young men do gain an opportunity to obtain self-worth through *legitimate* means — in other words, when a young man gets a chance to "go straight" because of a job, an educational opportunity, getting involved with a "decent" girl from a "good" family, etc. — they lose street credibility, but redefine and reinvent their sense of being and masculinity (Sanchez Jankowski, 1991; Vigil, 1988; Moore, 1991; Bourgois, 1995; Cohen, 1999: pp.1-2) reported that fatherhood caused many of the low-income young men in his study drastically to change their lifestyles from ones that involved crime, womanizing and absentee fathering to law abiding, involved family men. He attributed this to increasing disrespect in "barrios" and "ghettos" for men who deny responsibility for their children, something he called a "qualitative shift in the code of manhood."

Moore (1991: pp. 9) provocatively states, "Institutions develop where there are gaps in the existing institutional structure." Of course, she was referring to gangs having evolved to fill the social needs for Chicano youth that families and school no longer provide. Most all gang literature pertinent to Latinos takes this approach. Interestingly, virtually all the aforementioned literature has a section examining how family and/or fatherhood works to shape and define, at one point or another, masculinity. These studies present evidence that Latino youths either had very little contact with their fathers due to absenteeism, or that the relationship they had with their father was at best strained. As Moore (1991: pp. 90) put it, "'happy' fathers were not much discussed [by her respondents]. Most of

the descriptions of 'grouchy' fathers (and even some of the 'happy' ones) reflect both the pressures and insecurities of manual labor and also the Mexican masculine value of emotional reserve."

Although tempted, I refrain from resurrecting Mirandé's (1998) treatise on the misunderstood sense of Mexican masculine nurturance. Rather, my experience of growing up fatherless and finding myself strapped with the responsibilities of fatherhood at a young age in the very same neighborhood where I did most of this research, under many of the same social conditions, compels me to apply Moore's logic on institutional gaps to fatherhood. Perhaps the pressures and insecurities about which Moore speaks are more related to the precarious situation in which these blue-collar fathers find themselves because of a changing economy, one that is seriously limiting pathways to constructing traditional families that were once available to urban Latinos. If Mirandé's perception of masculinity (read; machismo) is right — and I suspect it is at least partially — the "pressures and insecurities" about which Moore writes are related to manual labor in the sense that it is limiting these men's ability to provide for their family, is affecting familial gender relations (Coltrane, 1996), and is seriously compromising their sense of masculinity and fatherhood. Furthermore, perhaps their sons, who have even fewer legitimate opportunities, are just now beginning to learn to exploit those illegitimate opportunities that are increasingly the only available resources to them in poor inner cities; learning to forge these resources into viable, if limited, support for their families — Mirandé's foundation for masculinity.

Non-traditional Fathers

Sociologist Vaughn Call, who in 1993 directed the national Survey of Families and Households, pointed out that the U.S. Census Bureau can document that there are 70 million mothers over the age of 15 in the U.S., but has an inadequate idea of how many fathers there are (Gibbs, 1993: pp. 53). Not all unwed mothers report the identity of the father (Robinson, 1988; Lindsay, 1990; Sonenstein, 1986; Erickson, 1998). However, where the age of an unmarried man who has fathered a child to a minor is reported, only 25% of them are minors themselves (Wattenberg, 1998; Erickson, 1998), but 80% are young; within three years of the age of the teen mother (Mauldon, 1998). The few small, non-representative studies that have compared racial/ethnic communities and how they deal with teen fatherhood, report that these young men are overwhelmingly poor, with 80% not residing with their child; 60% of Latino teen fathers reside with sanguinal families (Wattenberg, 1998; Horn, 1999).

Indeed, these men paint a bleak picture, but the task of defining the term "fatherlessness" remains difficult and contentious. Both of these men, along with a few other conservative scholars, claim that children's welfare is dependent on fathers' presence within a family and that responsible fathering is most likely to occur within the context of a heterosexual marriage. Consequently, they discount the reality that many, many single women have successfully raised children with very little or no help from their children's fathers (Luker, 1996; Coltrane, 1996) and that many fathers who do not primarily reside with their children remain actively involved with, and influential to, their children's lives (Danziger & Radin, 1990; Lamb, 1998; Sullivan, 1986; Cohen, 1999; Mauldon, 1998).

The foundational premise on which fatherlessness proponents build their arguments is that in a heterosexual marriage, parents naturally occupy "separate spheres." By this, they mean that a father plays a biologically predisposed role, differentiated from that of a mother because of their sex. The father is the breadwinner and protector of his family. He is the good provider — a role that is naturally fitted to his competitive and aggressive nature — indispensable, and one that only has meaning within a heterosexual, father-headed family. He portrays a role that has remained unchanged throughout the ages, and one that men assume begrudgingly. A woman's duties are, put plainly, to be a good wife and mother; dependent;

roles fitted to her sense of nurturance; complimentary to — but never overshadowing — men's role as "king of the hill"; meant to conscript men to their moral obligation as fathers and husbands. Within this context, fatherhood — for them — is an institution that not only grants men biological and moral authority to raise children like only fathers can but, by implication, one that also grants a family's legitimacy. In other words, if it is not a nuclear family, it is not a family. As the logic goes: If we want to restore "broken families" and cure "our most urgent social problem," return fathers to their proper place as head of the household.

The idea that parents' roles are naturally differentiated by biological predisposition — separate spheres — is not new. However, it has proven to be more of a cultural ideal than reality, and it is tied to the ideals and myths that are associated with nuclear families. Both universal cultural ideals, separate spheres and nuclear families, have long since been shown to be mechanisms that men use to maintain power of over women (Coltrane, 1996).[1] Similarly, the ideal perpetuated by fatherlessness arguments is that married fathers are extensively and qualitatively involved with their children and their involvement is indispensable and irreplaceable; by extension, the myths perpetuated are that unmarried fathers are never involved and that single mothers do not perform the duties traditionally performed by fathers. But, just as feminist and racial/ethnic family scholars have argued that nuclear families are but one form of family, largely only historically experienced by people privileged enough to afford them, fatherhood within a nuclear family is also just one representation of this experience. It is also an experience that is mostly representative of a privileged class. However, many family scholars still operate within a deficit framework where there is perceived to be a norm (i.e., nuclear family, married father, etc.) against which all other types are compared and found to be deficient. Unfortunately, the idea that gets perpetuated by these deficit-type perspectives is that there is an underlying biological reason (rather than a structural one) that accounts for variation from the norm.

A recent trend in scholarship, however, is one in which a distinct call is made to abandon deficit perspective approaches. Frameworks that operate within paradigms that attribute social problems to deviation from universally prescriptive roles (i.e., ascent of fatherlessness) are dangerous and counterproductive. Instead, a call is made for successful fatherhood to be characterized within the context of socioeconomic, racial/ethnic and historical meaning that men and women work together to create, whether inside or outside enduring relationships (Lamb, 1998; Coltrane, 1996). Hawkins and Dollahite (1997: pp. xiii) argue that a significant reason for the pervasiveness of literature that employs such perspectives is that "we lack a rich scholarly language to help us articulate fathers' capabilities and contributions." They have critiqued deficit paradigm theories, in particular role inadequacy paradigms, in order to attempt to build a language and a theory suitable to study fatherhood meaningfully — a theory they introduced as "generative fathering." They call "generative fathering" an approach to understanding fatherhood that "recognizes fathers' current contributions to the development of the next generation, the constraints under which most fathers labor, the good desires men have to be generative fathers, and their efforts to improve (pp. xiv). They interchange the words "generative fathering" with "fatherwork" which they describe as the work most men do to meet the needs of their children and next generation. They purposefully call this "work" to avoid any inference that fathering may be a role.

Research Questions

The generative fathering framework clearly offers a better alternative than a "separate sphere" or a "deficit perspective" from which to approach studying Chicano teen fathers. For one, it recognizes that most young men want to be involved with their children. Secondly, it departs from the notion that fatherhood is a biological role, which can lead to simplistic models that posit merely fathering children is inextricably linked to identity and self-worth for Chicanos — masculinity (see Goodyear, Newcomb, & Allison, 2000 for example). Third, it considers that structural and cultural factors contribute to how, and how much, young men do "fatherwork."

Perhaps most importantly, it not only recognizes how research and literature have contributed to myths and misconceptions about teen fathers and/or to their invisibility, but it consciously works to create a more accurate portrayal of young fathers and their contributions (Rhoden & Robinson, 1997). But, a caveat may be in order: generative fathering is offered as a conceptual ethic rather than a framework. It is not meant to be an approach to describe reality, rather it is meant to be a way by which to suggest what is possible and desirable (Dollahite, Hawkins & Brotherson, 1997).

While I remain a bit apprehensive about the moralistic undertones that a conceptual ethic may bring to the field, I am optimistic about the possibilities of this movement's ability to shift the direction of fatherhood studies away from the stream of popular thought that has — historically at worse — damaged our perception of non-White, poor, unmarried and teenage fathers, or — at best — cast them into obscurity. But in no way is this study meant to have ethical implications. The underlying assumptions, however, under which "generative fathering" framework operates — that young men have a desire to be involved with their children and that they contribute positively to raising their children in many ways that are best understood when viewed in cultural and structural contexts — makes its use worthwhile in the study of Chicano teen fatherhood in the industrial Midwest.

I have shown that much of the recent work on Latino youth and Latino teen fathers presents a demographic picture that suggests they have a high propensity toward being involved with and supporting their child regardless of the relationship that they have with the child's mother (Danziger & Radin, 1990; Gray, 1994; Sullivan, 1989 and 1993; Marsiglio, 1986; Robinson, 1988). And they juggle fatherhood — taking care of their business — with their responsibilities to contribute to their sanguinal families (Wattenberg, 1998; Fernandez-Kelly, 1995; Valenzuela, 1999; Gold, 2000; Zhou, 1997; Stepick, 1998). It has also been documented that, in general, mothers and grandmothers oftentime create obstacles that discourage and/or prevent a meaningful father/child relationship (Allen & Doherty, 1996; Wattenberg, 1993: as cited in Doherty, Kouneski & Erickson, 1998); and, the nature of fatherhood and masculinity is in transition (Coltrane, 1996; Mirande, 1998; Kimmel, 1995; Cohen, 1999).

The primary purpose of my work is to explore how young Chicano fathers perceive fatherhood, how that perception is influential in constructing the meaning of fatherwork (fatherhood, taking care of their business, etc.), how this fatherwork is tempered by structural and cultural forces and how it translates into the actual work they do to meet the needs of their, family, children and next generation. Therefore I examine ways that the fatherwork these young men do may be influenced by their perceptions of fatherhood and masculinity; how the perceptions of fatherhood and masculinity, held by young Chicano fathers, may be constructed from the social interactions they have with their own family members, children, peers, the mother of their children, and her family; and, finally, how these young men may interpret and modify their perception of fatherhood and masculinity in order to invent strategies to maintain meaningful relationships with their children.

Methods

The study used basic grounded theory techniques (Glaser & Strauss, 1967) to identify and code common family issues related to teen fatherhood that emerged from in-depth interviews that were first conducted with four youth advocates who work with Latino families and children, and, later, to identify common themes that surfaced from interviews with the informants. However, one of the objectives was to provide a richly detailed account of family systems that operate in an urban context. Therefore, interviews tried to capture other events and occurrences in these families' lives besides the fact that a young man was a father. And, because of the author's "veterano" status (alumni status — for lack of a better translation) as both a neighborhood affiliate and youth advocate gave me considerably more access to information that is generally not shared with outsiders, I chose to pattern my study after "Portraits of White Racism" (Wellman, 1993).

While my methodology is certainly based on Wellman's, it differs from his in many ways. Wellman's study on race and racism was conducted during racially volatile times of the late 1960's and early 1970's. Therefore, he thought it best to use people who had "lived the lives [he] wanted to understand" to collect data rather than rely on conventional research assistants who would more than likely be White, middle-class and not so quickly trusted by participants (Wellman, 1993: p. 67). He also presumed that because of the sensitive nature of the issues being discussed, initial group interviews would minimize the discomfort and render much richer data. His interviews were "one-shot affairs" and were not personally conducted by him. However, my own experience dictates that Chicano youth who frequent youth agencies are not very open to discussing their intimate family business in front of their peers, nor are they quick to confide in people who are not familiar fixtures at the agency. So, I chose not to use group interviews as a way to "break the ice." Instead, I relied heavily on the relationships that I had with agency workers and the presence that I had established at the agencies, over the course of a year, to assuage any apprehensions the youth may have had about my interest in their lives. Consequently, my interviews were not one-shot affairs.

Wellman used tape recorders, which he thought would encourage looseness and spontaneity and allow the interviewers to participate and exchange ideas with their informants. However, to reduce discomfort and because I've been pressured in the past by authorities to divulge information regarding gang affiliations and delinquency, my interviews were not tape recorded. Instead, they were later recorded as field notes from memory and only information pertinent to my study was included. There were a few times, however, when extremely pertinent and poignant statements were made, at which point I immediately wrote them down and later incorporated them into the field notes for analysis. Since most everyone, including my youth-advocate colleagues, had no knowledge that I was a student, I introduced my intentions from the very start so that I would not hamper my credibility as an advocate. Also, prior to all interviews, I described my research interests and this project to potential informants, and I explained to them that I was focusing my studies on Latino families and how they related to youth. I reassured the informants that I was not out to depict their families or their situations in a negative way. Of course, anonymity was assured. However, given my role in these communities, confidentiality was also a concern.

Like Wellman, I used very unstructured and open-ended interviews that gave a very broad, but detailed, account of the informants' life histories and their family interactions. In most cases, I never explicitly made an appointment for an initial interview. Instead, I made it my business to frequent the targeted youth programs in order to build rapport with the clientele through volunteering as a tutor, mentor, and/or advocate. Subsequent interviews occurred in settings that were convenient to the informants (i.e. family functions, bars, schools). I did probe considerably during subsequent discussions in order to direct our conversations toward subjects that would shed light on the major issues I wished to explore.

In order to promote the type of looseness and spontaneity that Wellman sought to create, whenever possible, I conducted subsequent interviews during activities that would allow me to interact with the informants in ways that were non-threatening and that would downplay my position as a researcher. I exploited chances, whenever presented, to participate in functions, occasions or simple activities that would allow me to relate with the informants on their terms. For instance, I assisted one of my informants in changing a bad engine in his car. I accompanied another on a trip to visit his older brother in prison. I also assisted an informant in repairing a broken water heater at his mother's house. During these sessions we traded anecdotes and stories about barrio life that sometimes turned nostalgic, what Wellman called "reciprocal exchange," which helped to "narrow the growing gap between academic researcher and communities" (p. 72). This technique proved very useful in educing information that put the informants' experiences with fatherhood into perspective in relation to their life history and socio-economic setting.

Throughout the interviews, I was careful not to mention words, like Latino, Chicano, Raza, macho, etc. in reference to fatherhood or manhood. I felt that these words might trigger a conditioned response that would lead me into stereotypic responses. Instead, I opened my discussion by pointing out anecdotal information provided by agency workers about the extraordinary lengths to which they went to keep their family afloat. Other than "getting my hands dirty" by participating in very typically mundane tasks that are somewhat of a marker of barrio life for young men, this proved to be the single most important part of my interviews, as it seemed to elicit very richly detailed and unabashed accounts of their family lives. These interviews did, nonetheless, take on cultural tones. Aside from the shear volume of interviews, one of the major reasons why Wellman did not conduct his own interviews is that he thought it best to pair the racial background of the interviewer with the informant in order to decrease the possibility of ethnocentric bias in his research and to discomfort. Of course, my racial background helped me to establish myself as a social inside, but I became acutely aware of the fact that my persona, at times, represented culturally contradictory terms (i.e., work on cars, talk boxing, etc. is not consistent with the perceptions that most of my informants had of higher education) for most of my informants, so their accounts only came to life after my authenticity as an insider was tested in several ways. For instance, after my family line and/or barrio affiliation was comfortably established, my knowledge and experience with barrio slang and landmarks were constantly being tested throughout these interviews. Most of the informants easily slipped between Spanish and English during our discussions as if to test whether or not I could competently follow the ebb and flow of bilingual conversations. I felt that they sometimes switched languages because they struggled to articulate their thoughts in the language that they were speaking, so I took their cues on when to switch languages because I did not want for any meaning to be lost.

Wellman looked for common themes in 107 informants' interviews. He later chose to create portraits, socio-histories, of only five informants whose ideas, experiences and lives were reflective of many. My interviews were largely reflective of my desire to emulate Wellman's "portraits" theme. But, they developed around my interest in exploring how family dynamics influence young Chicano fathers' perception of fatherhood, the changing structure of masculinity within structural and cultural contexts, how family dynamics and masculinity intertwine, and how young men construct meaning from this, rather than just plain fatherhood; and in the end, how this translates into fatherwork. Wellman used the insight that he gained from analyzing all 107 one-shot interviews to bring the five portraits to life. Because I spent considerably more time getting to know my informants through conversations and interactions, and because I wanted to let my informants tell their own stories, I chose to create "dialogues" by condensing the content of several interviews that I had with the same person into one short, detailed passage. These short dialogues were meant to be faithful to informants' stories, reflected what they thought was important about their perceptions of fatherhood, reflected what I thought they wanted me to know about their lives and convey the emotion and passion with which they articulated their feelings. I arranged the dialogues around four themes that emerged during interviews: 1) masculinity and fathering in spite of bad example; 2) fathering through familism; 3) competing self-interests between families and children; and 4) creative strategies of exploiting local resources to provide for families: "hustling."

Sample

The sample that I used was not randomly selected. I used purposive sampling techniques to seek out Chicano teen fathers, or Chicanos who had fathered children while in their teens, who were known to be actively involved with their children. I felt comfortable with the validity of this technique for a number of reasons: 1) the use of symbolic

interactism as a conceptual framework is not meant to produce predictive research, therefore it is assumed not to have generalizable qualities, or at least generalizing is always offered with a caveat; 2) access to this sample required extensive contact with agencies that could identify suitable informants; 3) in most cases, extended contact with potential informants was also mediated through agencies and professionals who could identified informants; 4) the nature of issues in this study are personally sensitive, which would not lend themselves easily to random sampling techniques (Wellman, 1993).

In all, I interviewed thirteen informants (see Appendix A). Of the 13, seven were young fathers, two were young mothers, three were former single teen mothers-turned young grandmothers and four were youth advocates. All the informants, except for one youth advocate, had positions within a family where a teen birth had occurred. To avoid minor/consent issues, the targeted fathers were not minors at the time of the interviews, but all were teenagers when their first child was born. Although one young mother was only 17 when I interviewed her, she was emancipated and was living with a "home provider," a person who is not a legal guardian, but is compensated by the state for supplying room and board.

I knew all 13 informants prior to the interviews, although in two cases not very well. Except for one of the youth advocates, all of the informants were Latina/o. One informant/advocate was a middle class Anglo woman who has worked for more than 15 years as an advocate in Southwest Detroit and whose insights and access have proven to be considerably useful. A second youth advocate/ informant was a Cuban American woman who has worked for more than three decades with Chicano youth — also middle class, but the mother of a single father and whose insight was also invaluable. The third youth advocate/informant was a Chicana who was born and raised in the neighborhood where she works, also was a single teen mother and the mother of three single mothers. The fourth advocate was a Chicana and a single teen mother, young grandmother and who had done extensive work creating programs for Chicana teen mother in California and Michigan. Aside from the first two mentioned women, all subjects were urban and working class from Lansing, Detroit and Adrian. All spoke English, but in varied forms and fluency. The interviews were conducted primarily in English, but Spanish was also used intermittently, in which cases I preserved the words and phrases so as not to lose meaning.

Analysis

Major Themes Masculinity and Fathering In Spite of Bad Example

Although all the young men in this study expressed desire to participate in their children's lives, the effort made to do so varied widely. Interestingly though, except for one young father, all these young men presented a very bad image of their own father due either to bad experiences or absenteeism. Nonetheless, these young men seemed to present the relationship with their own father, whether bad or good, as the strongest motivating factor in their wanting to do fatherwork. The following three portraits are of young men who describe how their fathers' inability "to take care of business" influenced the perception they had of their own responsibilities with respect to fatherhood.

Jesús

Jesús is 24 years old. He has two daughters. The oldest is six years old and the youngest is two years old. His girlfriend, who is the mother of his two children, is now pregnant with their third child. Although Jesus and his girlfriend have no immediate plans to get married, they do consider themselves to be an exclusive and committed couple. The age of this couple betrays their level of maturity. That is, they take their obligations very seriously and carve out a modest, but respectable, living. Although I know his family fairly well, coordinating an in-depth interview with him had been rather difficult since he has no phone and lives about 70 miles away. It was my luck that I was asked to be a compadre in his older brother's wedding and this gave me a real good opportunity to speak to him.

RGH: Jesús, what exactly motivates you to be so committed to providing for your family?

Jesús: I don't gotta tell you how my 'apa' [father] has been with my mother and my familia.

RGH: Remind me.

Jesús: El cabrón [asshole] would take off for months at a time and leave mi 'ama [mother] by herself to fend for the children. It was... miserable not knowing where he was or when he was coming back. Me and Rudy [older brother] were forced to hustle pa los ninos y mi 'ama [for the kids and my mother]. I hated it and I hate him [his father] for it. As I got older I started to go out and talk to my old man's compa's [close friends]. They told me he had a vieja [old lady] on the side... [who] lived a few towns over, and that's where he'd go when he'd disappear. Sometimes he'd end up in Mexico, but most often he was with this vieja [old lady]. It took me a little while before I found out exactly where she lived, but I figured it out. For about a year, I'd go and park in front of this woman's house, but I never had the courage to confront the man. What pissed me off the most was that the man would come back home and expect to be chingon [boss] of the house, like he never left. One time when he was gone, my girl got pregnant with my first kid. It turns out that my own 'ama [mother] was also pregnant. Chingaos... they were both pregnant at the same time... my father took off again. "Andaba yo bien encabronado porque se habia ido—y tambien aguita'o... sí, tambien aguitao" [I was really pissed off because he had taken off — and scared, too... yes, scared, too].

Jesús was infuriated at his father because he felt the pressure of having to take care of "his own business" and was afraid that he couldn't also take care of his mother, brothers and sister. So, he called his older brother who was living away at the time and they went together to his father's mistress' house. They literally dragged him out and took him home. On the way home, they told him that they would kill him if he didn't stop hurting their mother and neglecting their siblings. As it turns out, his father took about two years to really get it together. And, for a short period of time, the child with whom his mother was pregnant during this episode (who is now six years old) thought Jesús was her father. Things have changed now, though. His father's at home and his parents appear to be happy. Jesús and his girlfriend have since had another child. She is one month old. However, the relationship between Jesús and his father is a little strained. Jesús thinks it's because he is a constant reminder to his father that he wasn't "taking care of his business." Jesús thinks what really motivated his father to straighten up was the fact that Jesús was the man of the house and his father couldn't handle the fact because he is a very possessive person.

RGH: So he's macho?

Jesús: No, far from it. He don't take care of his business — he's just jealous and real possessive. See, [very impassioned] I love my vieja — I'd kill for her. My children, I'd kill for them and die for them all in the same day — I'd take the food right out my own mouth so they could eat. I can't imagine it being any way else for a man. He's not like that, he doesn't take care of his business — he's no man.

RGH: His business? You mean he's not a man because he takes off when you need him most, because he has girlfriends... why?

Jesús : Look, I got movida [girlfriends] and my vieja [old lady] knows — I think — but I never bring it home and I do take care of my business; I take care of my family — feed my children, help my mom and little brothers and sisters — I'm a man.

Junior

Junior had been a fairly good student through ninth and tenth grade. Through those two years, he was a fairly normal kid. He hung around with a tightly-knit group of (Chicano) guys who played sports, listened to Tejano music, but dressed in hip-hop clothes. They weren't angels, but by no means were they "bad kids" ...at one point, the school called the protective services because they were fairly certain that his father was beating him up pretty regularly. The relationship between Junior and his father totally disintegrated when Junior was in

eleventh grade and his girlfriend became pregnant — this was shortly after his parents divorced, which by Junior's account, was precipitated by his father's alcoholism, explosive temper, recent unemployment and infidelity. The fighting between Junior's parents, between his family and that of his girlfriend, coupled with Junior's father pressuring him not to acknowledge the child proved to be too much. Junior was invited to leave his father's house. He was 16 years old.

I interviewed him after a meeting of a Latino male mentoring group in which I was involved. At the time, he appeared to be much older than the last time I saw him, which was when he was in the midst of dealing with his newfound fatherhood — he looked very tired. He had on khaki pants, a button-up shirt and a tie slung around his neck, untied. He had no books. He nodded to me and took a seat at the front of the room. He drifted off to sleep a few times while I was speaking.

Afterwards, I spoke with him alone.

RGH: You look tired, boy. What's with the tie?

Junior: I got a job… they make me dress up like a monkey, but it's okay 'cuz it gives me a minute to move wares [sell marijuana] on the job.

RGH: You still got plans to go to school… [local university]?

Junior: Sure, but it looks like I'm gonna end up doing Last Chance College [slang for local community college] for a minute 'till I can get it together… Right now, I gots to take care of my business… I gots to provide for my child [with much pride].

RGH: I thought your baby is in Mexico? What, did your ex move back to Michigan?

Junior: Oh, she's still in Mexico, so is my baby. But listen, I gotta cruise 'cuz I gotta be at work in 20 minutes.

RGH: You need a ride?

Junior: Nah, vato [dude], I'm driving my new old lady's ranfla [car]. She's older, so she got it together — got a car.

RGH: So, you have a kid with her, too?

Junior: Simon [yes], she also got three kids of her own.

RGH: Four kids all together?

Junior: Simon [yes]. That's why I'm hustling so much.

RGH: Wow, that's a lot of responsibility for a 17-year-old. You got solid plans for your future?

Junior: I'm 18, vato [dude]. And right now, I ain't got time for my own future, I gotta make plans for my child's future.

At this point, I asked Junior if he'd be interested in sharing some of his experiences with fatherhood so I could use them for this study. Junior's eyes pierced me for about 30 seconds. After staring at me with his jaws clenched, he said yes.

RGH: Tell me about fatherhood.

Junior: [very impassioned] You want fatherhood? Okay, being a father is having [it] up against a wall. I gotta kill myself 'cuz my kid needs stuff right now, but I know that in order to really do good for him I gotta get a better job, and… that ain't gonna happen unless I go to school. Yeah, my old man's been workin' off and on at GM. He's done now, though. He's trained in machines or something and he ain't got no job. So there ain't no good chance of me doing that kinda' stuff. All I can do is these stupid… jobs making minimum wage — that's why I gotta do stuff on the side.

RGH: You're young. Wouldn't it just be easier to work on yourself right now? I mean, what motivates you to "keep your ass up against the wall?"

Junior: I need to figure out something better because I'm killing myself, now. I can't do this for too long. It's killing me. Listen, I gotta go to work. I'll call you later, maybe you can help me figure some of this out.

A few months later I ran into him at the grocery store. He introduced me to his "new wife and children." He told me that his life had changed for the better since he quit school and was able to work more hours. He landed a "good job at a local public warehouse," but he knew that eventually, for his kids' sake, he was going to have to matriculate in adult education. He hasn't spoken to his father since he moved in with his wife and he doesn't expect to anytime soon.

Beto

I first met Beto when he was a freshman in high school. Both he and his twin brother were avid wrestlers. Despite the fact that these boys were twins, Beto seemed to be much more mature. Quite often he took on the role of being the older brother. He was always the one talking for both boys and it appeared that his family also put more responsibility on his shoulders.

When Beto was in tenth grade and still 15 years old, he would drive the family station wagon to and from school with his twin and his little brothers and sisters. That year, he also quit wrestling so that he could get a job and help his single mother out with the bills. He also went to great lengths to make sure that his twin and his siblings were doing good in school. He was very proud of the academic and athletic success that his twin was enjoying and he seemed to go out of his way to ensure it. Once, his twin was involved in a fight at school and was surely to be expelled, Beto took the blame so that his brother wouldn't lose his eligibility to wrestle.

By the time Beto was in eleventh grade, he was pretty much working full time, going to school and making sure his siblings were making it to school. This is when his girlfriend became pregnant for the first time. He quit school and moved his girlfriend into his mother's house. After the baby was born, he had an elaborate wedding. His twin was his best man. He is now 20 years old.

I called him to ask him if he would talk to me about his experiences with fatherhood. He suggested that we meet for a beer after work, which was 11 p.m. for him. So we did.

RGH: So what about fatherhood?

Beto: It's not that big of a deal. I love my vieja [old lady] and I knew that sooner or later we were gonna get married. So I figured, why not sooner? I was pretty worried about my little brother after I quit going to school because you know he has a bright future and I used to have my hands full just trying to keep those otro pendejos [other idiots] away from him. But it turned out all right. He graduated. And now he's going to community college. He wants to be an architect — of course, he helps me and my older carnal [brother] out with my jale [enterprise] on the side. I'm so proud of him.

RGH: What about you?

Beto: Me? No hombre [no, man]. I'm doing good. I work two shifts and I have a little jale [selling marijuana and cocaine] on the side. So, my vieja [old lady] and my babies have everything they need. The hard part is trying to keep my little brothers and sisters in line. They don't want to go to school. They don't want to work. All they want to do is listen to that... black] music and play video games. But, I try to keep them in line.

RGH: What about your dad?

Beto: Do you know my dad? If you know him you better tell me where he is. The guy went to Texas about six years ago to find work and never came back. News came up from the valley that he's in la pinta [prison]. My jefita [mother] don't believe it, though, 'cuz one of her comadres [best friends] told her that she saw him in Sananto [San Antonio] with a girl and a baby. I don't doubt it. If I ever see him... lo voy a destripar [I'm going to disembowel him]. We don't need him anyways. We got along fine since he left and we're doing good now.

RGH: What about school?

Beto: What about it?

RGH: Do you feel that you want to go back?

Beto: For what? My carnal [brother] graduated and he's working at the same place I am. He's four years older and I got him the job there. Really, I think my carnal [brother] is the only vato [dude] there who graduated. So I go to adult ed... so what? You think that if I went to adult ed people are going to line up to give me $100,000 a year job? Adult ed is useless. Right now, I'm doing good and as long as people don't think that I'm too smart, they give me work.

RGH: Does your vieja [old lady] work?

Beto: No. Right now she's too busy with the two babies and besides she helps my jefita [mother] out with my carnalitos [little siblings]. Hopefully, though, sometime in the future, my jefita [mother] said that she'll watch my esquincles [brats] so that my vieja [old lady] can start working. My jefita's [mother's] been teaching her how to cook real good. As you can see, I've been eating pretty regularly. Sometimes, they take orders for tamales and make them on Fridays or holidays. They don't make much money, but it's something. Eventually, if everything goes all right, they'd like to start a little catering business... you know, for weddings, quinceañeras [girls' 15 year birthday party], baptisms...

RGH: If you already had so much responsibility for your little brothers and sisters, why'd you have kids?

Beto: That's an easy... question to answer. I had sex, pendejo [idiot]. (We both erupt in laughter over the comment.) Several of the surrounding men who were paying attention to our conversation also laugh. At this point, I wasn't sure if Beto was going to be completely honest with his statements or he was going to perform for the audience. But after he realized that people were listening, he turned to the men and told to them "why don't you comadres [ladies] mind your own... business? This is business entre machos [between men]." [After that, the men seemed to go about their own conversations.]

RGH: Let me rephrase the question. A lot of guys your age have babies, but not too many of them take responsibility and since you already had so much responsibility, why'd you choose to drop out of high school to play daddy?

Beto: Now it's tricky. Let's see... number one, I was already pretty much on my way out of school anyway. I mean, I wasn't really doing anything at school, but getting into trouble and trying to keep my carnal out of trouble. So I figured, what's the difference? I don't want to be there... they don't want me there. I was already working 40 hours and my jefita [mother] still couldn't make ends meet. So, I left. Number two, when mijo [my son] was born, my vieja [old lady] told me that if I didn't take care of him then I'd be just as bad as my dad. That really pissed me off so I got two jobs and brought my girlfriend, who's now my wife, to live with us. It was hard at first because there were so many of us, but after I started really working and not having to go to school, we were able to get a bigger house. Besides, my older carnal [brother] was being a vago [vagrant]. He couldn't keep a regular job or anything, so I told him to get out and quit dragging us down. He took off for a little while... went to Texas to find my apá [father]... then he came back. That's when I got him a job working with me. But now, he's living at his jaina's [girlfriend's] cantón [place].

RGH: What about your vieja's [old lady's] family? Do you guys get along?

Beto: When she first got pregnant, her mom was pissed off 'cuz she thought that I wasn't gonna take care of her. Her father isn't around and her mom told me that I was the same type of vato [dude]. You know, "hit and run." Now, I think she's happy for us. We go over there sometimes for dinner on Sundays. Still, though, she pushes us to finish school. Mostly though, she pushes my old lady 'cuz she says that she needs to be able to take care of herself just in case something happens to me. I know what she means though is just in case I leave. I don't blame her though, it's not like she don't got nothing to go by. I mean, it seems like all my friends' jefes [fathers] have split and gone to Texas... or they seem to go too often. Me, I'm not like that. I love my kids

too much. Even if something were to [go wrong] between me and my ruca [girl], I'd still be with my kids. She knows it too 'cuz when she gets out of hand and starts to talk about splitting, I tell her to leave, but she better don't take the babies. That don't happen too often, though. She knows I love her no matter what I say. Yeah, I love my kids... I want to have four more. I figure that six is a good number.

RGH: Six Kids! That's a lot of work, little brother. Do you really think that you could support six kids?

Beto: Maybe not right now, but I got a strong back and I ain't afraid to use it. If I stay working at the warehouse, maybe I move up to supervisor or something. I know one vato [dude] who's only been there for eight years and already he's making straight feria [money]. He got to be making at least $11 'cuz he's driving a hi-lo. Now those vatos [dudes] make money. The only thing is though that they give those jobs to bolillos [Whites]. I think it might be hard to get a job like that no matter how hard I work. That's the way it is around here. And that's why I'm saving my money to go to Texas. Over there, at least a vato [dude] got a chance.

RGH: Go to Texas like your dad went?

Beto: No way. If, and when, I go, I'm gonna take everybody with me. None of that me leave first and then send for everybody. That stupid stuff gots to go. I got familia there that will help us get started. They keep telling us to come, but I don't want just to take off. I need to figure out a way so that all of us can go. But I know we got to go. And speaking of going, my old lady's gonna think that I got movida [a girlfriend] if I don't get home soon. Not that I don't got movida [girlfriend], but I got to do some things to keep the peace.

These three young men's experience with adolescence is typical of poor and immigrant Latino children. They accept and fulfill many familial obligations that truncate their childhood. In fact, at least two of these three young men had accepted responsibilities normally associated with parenthood long before they became actual parents. They also place high importance on family. All three live with their partner and strive to construct their meaning of fatherhood based on what they perceive to be a traditional and cultural mode, parents who live together and raise children. Perhaps this situation is circumstantial or temporary, related to the fact that the particular point in time at which I interviewed them, they were getting along with their partner. However, they all presented great disdain for their own fathers' inability to support and maintain a family in a traditional way, "take care of their business." None of these three informants once alluded to sexual prowess, domination or the biological act of fathering a child to having been strongly associated with their sense of masculinity. Rather, manhood (masculinity), for them, is very much a cultural ideal to which they aspire and it is tempered by whether they can support their children and be available to them; do fatherwork. Interestingly, they all chastise their fathers for having been unfaithful to their mothers, but they seem to tolerate infidelity for themselves, as long as they "don't bring it home" or it does not effect their ability to keep the peace in their household.

This issue is informed by Elaine Bell Kaplan (1997: pp. 121-125), who presents evidence that young black females perceive a qualitative difference between male and female love, and she suggests that in the midst of limited access to male love, due to an "...absent father, which most sociologists use in describing fathers who are not available emotionally or financially for their children...," young black mothers look to their look sons to provide that male love missing in their life. Where Jesús, Beto and Junior are concerned, they lament the absence of their father and are quick to point out passionately the profundity of their love for their children. They imply that they love their children permanently and unconditionally. They "will kill and die for them all in the same day," but they distinguish this love from the love they feel for their partner. They do what they have to do, whether legal or otherwise, to make sure their children have access to a father's love, which they associate with stability. For these young men, they experience for the first time the fatherly love without which they perceive they were raised.

Ironically, although they perceive their fatherly love as a source of stability for their children and as a source of self-respect for themselves, they also understand that the stability that they are providing is precariously balanced due to their limited opportunities for gainful employment and advancement, they have their "ass up against a wall." While these young men seriously increased their life's load by accepting what they perceive to be their parental responsibilities, it did not come at the expense of opportunities. These young men had enormous familial responsibilities and access to few legitimate opportunities regardless the birth of their first child. As Beto (a high school dropout) points out, his older brother who is a high school graduate and who has no children works along side with him at a warehouse for minimum wage. And his little brother who is a high school graduate, attends junior college and who has no children, works along side both of them selling drugs.

Not all the Latino teenage fathers in this study were victims of poverty or products of what they perceived to be deficient fathering. For the following young man in particular, the immediate issues surrounding his situation were different. Because of his father's employment offered stability for his family, he had access to a middle class, suburban environment. Consequently, his opportunities for legitimate success were much greater. However, what remained constant was the pursuit of a cultural ideal of masculinity — if at first misguided.

Andrés

I first met Andrés when he had just been admitted to college. He pretty much seemed to be a middle class kid with a lot of ambition. He had fairly strong aspirations of going to law school and knew that he had to perform well as an undergrad in order to realize his dreams. He was a very bright student and I had no doubt about his academic success. However, he was very timid and seemed to be a bit intimidated by other students who were from urban areas. Also, when I first met him he had no real sense of ethnic identity.

Over the course of his first year in college, he became involved in an activist Chicano student group and went through an ethnic transformation. Although, I've witnessed this ethnic birth among middle class suburban kids quite often, he seemed to grasp at stereotypical images and adopt them as his own. This, too, I've seen, but not quite to the extent that this young man had gone. Perhaps it seemed a bit extreme to me because when I met him at the beginning of his first semester, he introduced himself as "Andy from middle class suburb." He was dressed in Docker pants and boat shoes. A year later, he was invited to speak to a group of local high school youth whom I had helped mentor. He introduced himself to these kids as "Andrés from inner city." His head was shaved, he had a big Mayan calendar tattooed on his arm and he was dressed like a cholo. He was boasting of his past escapades as a gang member and said that he had fathered a child, but he had never seen it.

Of course, I knew he was from a middle class suburb and probably the closest he ever got to city was to watch the central city's football team play games at its suburban stadium. But, I acted stupid and I could sense that he was relieved that I didn't mess up his game. Afterwards, however, I did ask him about his child. He told me that some girl had claimed that he was the father of her child, right before he went to college. He said that he wasn't too sure about it, so he just ignored it. "I been with a lot of jainas [girls] and any one of them could make the claim, but just 'cuz they claim, don't mean that it's true. Yeah, these crazy... just see a vato [dude] tryin' to do good and they attach themselves. I ain't havin' none of it."

Throughout the course of his college career, he has maintained a fairly high profile as a student leader and I would see him regularly either in passing or at cultural programs. The past year, I noticed that his involvement in student activities began to wane, and when I did see him, he had a little boy with him. About a year ago, he introduced me to the little boy as his son. He told me that he started to get real serious about finishing school because his responsibilities had increased immensely.

When this interview took place, his appearance and demeanor had gone full circle since I first met him. Although his hair was still quite short, it was nowhere near the shaved head that he had previously sported. He no longer dressed like a cholo. Although he didn't look like a preppy school kid either, he appeared to be a lot less preoccupied with his image.

Andrés: You know, a lot has changed since we last talked. My kid is living with me, now. I got back with his mother. We're kind of like a full-fledged family. We're thinking about getting married next year… after I graduate and figure out what I'm gonna do with my life.

RGH: Why the big change?

Andrés: Man… you know, I had been listening to the wrong people. I got influenced by what I saw on TV and at the movies — somewhere along the line I got the impression that it was a macho thing to be bragging about having a kid. You know… prove to people that I had a past. I don't know who I was fooling, though. All it got me was a court date and a lot of flack from my old man. My old man is really old. He's 66 years old. You know, he kept telling me how he came to Michigan to pick sugar beets and that he refused to get married — let alone father any children — until he was on his feet. He didn't land a good job 'till he was 40. He didn't start working the autos until he was 40, and that's when he started a family. Then, I ended up in court for non-payment of child support. I was 19 years old and being threatened with jail time if I didn't make good on some cash. I tried to be stupid and so I denied that the kid was mine. Well, a paternity test was done, and it ended up that the kid was mine. I knew all along that the kid was mine. But, I didn't want to admit it because things were going so smoothly for me at school. At the time, it got out at school, too. And, mostly all those vatos that I was running with couldn't have cared less. The girls, though, really gave me a hard time. They started calling me… [names] for not taking care of my business. Before long, the vatos must have started listening to them because they started razzing me about it, too.

RGH: So it was peer pressure?

Andrés: Some, but not all. It was really one dude that made me open up my eyes. He's an older guy who really called me out on the way I was behaving. He told me that I was listening to the wrong people. And that the only way I could regain my father's respect was to step up and take responsibility. My older brother is in prison. He started messing up pretty badly and before he knew it he was a junky. He got put inside because he was stealing an awful lot. You know, I really believe if he had had a better lawyer he'd still be this side of the wall. But what do we know about the law? That's why I want to be a lawyer. My brother really hurt my old man. My old man keeps blaming himself. Then, when I went to court, it was the first time I had actually seen my old man cry.

RGH: Why'd he cry?

Andrés: Because he said he failed to raise a man. He asked me what kind of man would want to deny that he had a child. I told him that it wasn't mine and his mother was just trying to ruin my chances of going to school. He told me that he had seen the baby and that there was no way that it wasn't mine. And, no amount of education, or success will make him believe that I'm a man. He was going on and on about how he sacrificed and worked double shifts so that we could live in Rochester Hills. He worked in Ypsilanti and mostly during the week he slept there on a cot so that he wouldn't have to commute. Seriously, I very seldom saw the man, when I was growing up, except on the weekends. Then he said how he wouldn't even teach us Spanish because he didn't want us to be disadvantaged in any way. He wanted us to be aggressive like the gavachos. He wanted us to go after what we wanted. He said that that was his mistake because somehow we learned that lesson too well. He was supposed to retire that year but he didn't. He chose to work extra so that he could contribute some money to my son's mother. He told me that he was ashamed of me and not to come and speak with him until I was ready to accept my responsibility.

RGH: So you had a kid, did that make you a man?

Andrés: It's not that simple. I had to take a real hard look at myself. I had never seen my father cry — not even when my older brother went to prison. I wanted him to be proud of me. I'm not gonna tell you that it was an instantaneous decision. I wanted to finish school. And, I had already made a name and life for myself over at college — and it didn't include a kid. You know, I'm not stupid. I know that my father didn't want me to quit school. I know that he wanted me to claim my child. But, I needed to figure out a way to claim my child and not quit school.

RGH: Did you? How?

Andrés: I still can't explain how this happened. After we had gone to court and called each other every name in the book, I managed to get back with my kid's mother. Don't ask me to explain that, even I don't understand it. But it happened. I took out a student loan to make good on my past child support and then they moved to college with me. Sure, I had to seriously adjust my life, but I love my son and he has made me grow up a lot. I can't say that I'll be winning any awards any time soon for father of the year, but I'm there and I'm learning. My son has been the single biggest inspiration in my life. The second biggest inspiration is my father. I've proven to him that I can be a father. Now, I can't wait to graduate in order to prove to him that all his work wasn't fruitless. Both these men in my life have shown me that there ain't no textbook written about Latinos, Chicanos, Mexicans… that can teach you about how important family is. When I got to college I didn't realize how much I already knew about my culture. I resented my father for not having taught me more. Now I know that it's nothing you can learn… it's something that you have to live.

Andrés' experience with fatherhood and culture is distinguished by his more privileged situation — he had access to legitimate opportunity. Although his father was an immigrant, Andrés perceived him to have put off having a family until he could provide a stable environment, or perhaps more importantly, until he could provide his children with access to good education and opportunity. What Andrés learned from his father's example was that he should pursue success through education, and that success would define his manhood. He was also strongly influenced by the media's stereotypes of machismo. Because he grew up in a White middle class suburb, he had little opportunity to assuage the power of the media's influence through meaningful social interactions with other Chicanos.

In a misguided effort, largely influenced by the media, to be perceived as Chicano, he initially defined his masculinity by what he perceived to be "macho" — irresponsibly fathering a child and having a criminal past, what Beto disparagingly referred to as "hit and run." And, if there is one, he had a good reason to deny his parental responsibility; he did not want it to hamper his chances for attaining academic success. Interestingly, similar to the situations of Jesús, Beto and Junior who were influenced by what they felt was the absence of their father's love, in the end Andrés was also strongly influenced by his father's love. However, the strength of his father's cultural convictions about fatherhood and family, and the threat of withholding the source of fatherly love and approval motivated Andrés to "be a man" and acknowledge and support his child. What's more, where Jesús, Beto and Junior had little access to opportunity because of their social positions, regardless of their parental responsibilities, Andrés had more access because of his relatively privileged situation and doing fatherwork did little to change his life's trajectory; he finished school and is providing gainfully (legitimately) for his child.

Responsibility — "Takin' Care of Business"

A recurrent phrase that appeared throughout these interviews was "taking care of business." This phrase was used by both men and women primarily to describe the compliance of obligations, but its meaning took on several cultural and gendered dimensions. Sometimes it was repeated in Spanish (atender a sus asuntos) after it was said in English, as if the informant speaking wanted to accentuate it or make sure I understood that it had special cultural meaning. In most cases it was used in the context of men attending to their families' needs — doing

fatherwork. In other cases, young men used it to describe the work that the women in their lives did to keep their families together.

In one situation, Miguel Angel, who had been "sucker punched" by another neighborhood youth, described how his mother told him he had better "take care of his business," — retaliate — or he would certainly be considered a "sissy." This young man recounted his mother's words being: "...sabes [you know], no seas chillón [don't be a cry baby], now that your apá's not here, you have to set an example for your little brothers. Vete a atender a tus asuntos [go take care of your business] because if you don't people are going to get the idea that no one in this family can [take care of business] and we'll all be in bad shape."

Miguel Angel recounted this story when he was describing the obligations that he felt he had assumed in the face of his father's death. The message he received from his mother through instances like this is that the presence of men who can protect families is important. However, he also recognized and praised, as did most other young men who had little or no contact with their fathers, his mother for the work she did single-handedly, after his father's death, to maintain him and his siblings.

Most often the phrase was used in context of the perceptions of "good" fatherhood and what informants perceived to be associated obligations. The informants in this study who had presented their own fathers as bad examples described them as "not taking care of their business." Or, the informants would use the phrase to describe themselves as "good" fathers. I pressed for a definition of the term when it was used in this context. Invariably, the informants would attach the meaning to providing financial help to meet the immediate physical needs of their children — as a responsibility or obligation. However, it was also very clear that the definition of the phrase, and the informants' perception of fatherhood, extended the obligation to include nurturance of their children; for example, spending qualitative time with their children, teaching them things, attending doctor appointments, meeting with teachers, etc.

What was also very obvious about the various meanings of this phrase was that it was flexible enough to allow the young men to construct a perception of "good" fatherhood without holding themselves to the same standards with which they measured their own fathers. Oftentimes the same young men who disparaged their own fathers for infidelity or not "being with" their mothers, but they clearly implied that "good fatherhood" — taking care of business — for themselves, did not necessarily mean that they were expected to be involved with or faithful to their children's mother.

Fathering through Familism

While the lives of the following two young men, Chava and Miguel Angel, are marked by poverty, violence and reckless or absent fathers, their stories give a rich description of the influence and power that Latinas wield to maintain a family. They also render a view into the complex and changing nature of gender relations in Latino families. Both these young men attribute their sense of masculinity, whether culturally based or not, to strong women.

Chava

Although I've known his daughter's maternal family all my life, I first became acquainted with Chava when I worked at a local community agency, about 10 years ago. At the time, Chava was a member of the **** [local gang]. This gang is one of the oldest, most highly organized, most feared and most brutal Latino gangs that operate in this city. Although this community agency targets gang members, and at any given time inside its walls there may be four or five area cliques represented by youth and/or adults, it has long been considered to be neutral territory. Agency workers say that this is good for gang members. The neutrality makes them feel comfortable enough to venture outside their niche to receive services, which is not typical behavior. However, this center is also a hub of activities geared toward non-affiliated neighborhood youth. And, this is bad for them since, oftentimes, the center is considered to be a primary recruitment area for gangs. However, recruitment is not tolerated and most kids respect the rule. The kids who don't

respect it, are often reprimanded by their peers. The point is that "good" kids are often placed at further risk by well-meaning agencies. Since the baby's maternal grandmother and I worked together at this agency, it gave me a very good opportunity to do a multiple interview. The following is a discussion with both Chava and the grandmother, Lala.

RGH: Tell me about when Dulce got pregnant.

Lala: You know, it was bad enough that she went and got herself pregnant, but… she didn't have to go get pregnant by this idiot. I guess, Chava wasn't that bad of a kid… Right after mija [my daughter] had the baby, Chava was having some real trouble adjusting to his new circumstances. I mean, it wasn't like he dropped everything because mija [my daughter] was pregnant, but I could tell he was torn between la vida loca [the crazy life] and having a child. His mother was no help either. I mean, Chava was 15 and his mother was barely 30 years old. She was depending on him to bring home money so that she could support her habit and other children by a different father… I think they may have even shared the same probation officer once or twice. He would come around every now and then with a bag of pampers, but he would make sure that they were hidden in a shopping bag or a duffel bag. Boy, was he in love with that child. I could tell. There really was no other reason for him to come around… Dulce would either go upstairs or take off the minute she saw him coming. So, it wasn't like he was coming around to see her. I had a hard time figuring out whether or not to let him come around because he was so deep into the gang movida [movement]. We had our house shot up a couple times before we had to move, so I was scared. I know it wasn't because of him, but it still scared me that he might bring some…our way and we end up paying for it. But he loved his child, so I really encouraged him to come by. In the end, I think he may have been coming by because of me, too. I mean, after I really got to know the idiot, I came to like him. And his own mother was such a mess.

Chava: All the craziness broke loose when mija [my daughter] was about a year old. See, this is about when I got picked up by the chota [police] because they said I killed a leader of the ***** [local gang]. When they picked me up, they said I had this guy's drugs and gun. They charged me with first degree murder. I didn't do it, but I had such a bad reputation in the neighborhood. And my camaradas [friends] were really starting to get pissed off because I was slowly trying to find an out. As it came down, the cops planted the drugs and the gun. I still think the cops killed the guy and then wanted to get me off the streets, too. And, even if my carnales [friends] had come out in my defense, who's gonna believe them?

Lala: Anyway, I rallied a lot of support from the community and we hired a lawyer. As it turns out, the cops ended up losing some of the evidence. How convenient… just as soon as we start fighting the system, they claim they lost the gun. They didn't lose the rocks [crack cocaine], though. So, mijo [my son — referring to Chava] got off with probation and a teller [electronic tether]. About then, Chava's mother took off with some vato [dude] to Chicago. Since Chava was still a minor and he was on probation, his grandmother and I agreed to watch out for him. For the first month he stayed with me. Meanwhile, Dulce started going through problems of her own, so she moved in with some guy she was seeing at the time. She may as well have left the baby because Roni, Rocky, Luisa [her other daughters] and I were ones taking care of her. But it gave Chava a chance to really bond with the baby. Afterwards when Chava went to stay with his grandma, I would drop the baby off to them and they would take care of her. It was crazy, but it worked out well for the baby because she really got a sense of who her family was.

Chava: After I got rid of the "teller," I enrolled in a GED program. I did this mainly to keep my probation officer off my back, but little by little I started to really move away from the streets. I don't know if it was really because of my baby… but, little by little I really started to become a real vato — hecho y derecho [a real dude — straight].

Lala: He says it's because he found Jesus. I really think that the first degree murder charges scared... him. He had to convince some of his doubting friends that he really didn't do it because they wanted him dead. Remember — he was accused of killing one of his own leaders... it's probably a combination of everything. To this day, even though Dulce still isn't with him, every time she falls hard from a relationship, or loses a job, or... gets pregnant... he's always there to help her out. He's really a good guy now. His baby is 10 years old and she goes back and forth between my house... and his house. I know I said this already, but he is such a nice man — he lives with his grandma and takes care of her. He even takes Dulce's other children even though they're not his. Can you believe it? Chava? Tattoos por donde quiera [all over the place]. I would have bet a million dollars that he wouldn't have lived past his seventeenth birthday...

Chava: Even I would've taken some of that action!

Lala: Now, he's like the son I never had. If it weren't so crazy, I'd try to set him up with one of my other daughters... but that'd be a sin. Maybe if my ex-husband had been half the man Chava is, my girls wouldn't be in such a mess... I hope one day Dulce can work it out with Chava."

Miguel Angel

I've known this young man since he was a freshman in high school. He is the oldest of four children whose father was killed in a drug raid about 10 years ago. Even though his parents weren't together when his father was killed, he had a fairly close relationship with him. Early in his high school years, he became involved with the drug trade and was pretty heavily involved in a neighborhood gang. When he was in tenth grade he was arrested for kidnapping and attempted murder. He was eventually cleared of those charges, but he did get probation for two years.

Currently, he is a sophomore in college. He is studying graphic arts and is quite active in student groups. I ran into him on campus in September and we talked about his academic progress. He said that he had made the dean's last year and was really comfortable with his studies. During the course of our conversation, I noticed that he had a picture of a child on his key ring and I asked him about it. He told me that it was a picture of his son. Upon hearing the news that he was a father, I asked him if he wouldn't mind talking to me about his experiences for my project. He agreed.

RGH: Hey vato [dude]... I didn't know you were a dad. Why the big secret?

MA: It ain't no secret, homes. It's just that I don't go tellin' everybody my business. Ya sabes, buey [you already know, idiot]... when the jainas [girls] find out you got a kid, they don't give you no movida [play].

RGH: Oh, I understand... for a second I thought maybe you were embarrassed.

MA: Chale [no way]! How could I be embarrassed of mijo [my son]? He's the best thing that ever happened to me.

RGH: So, tell me about it.

MA: Bueno [well], things were going great for me as a student, sabes [you know]. I mean, I got jale [work] doing some artwork over in the city, then over here everybody wants me to do artwork too. Business is so good that I even had cards made up. See, here's one for you. If you ever need some painting done, let me know... te doy una quebradita [I'll give you a break]. But comoquiera [anyway], it was a bit hard coming to school and hanging out and studying with a group of people, then having to back into the barrio and live with another group of people who aren't really into to school. Yeah, then I have to look out for my jefita [mother] and my carnalitos [younger siblings]. As much as I wanted just to move to campus, it just wouldn't work because my jefita [mother] needed help. The good thing, though, is that my little brother is graduating this year and he's been a real good kid. You know, he's not a torcido [delinquent] — he never took no twists and turns like I did. From the start he was a good kid and he's always helped out at home when I couldn't be there.

But now that mijo [my son] was born, I had to get my own cantón because my ruca [girlfriend] and my jefita [mother] don't get along. You know, she's Vietnamese and my jefita [mother] got a problem with that. And besides, my ruca's [girlfriend's] family had a problem with me. They didn't want me coming around. She lived over there up on **** Street where all the chinitos [Asians] live. They're pretty tough, too. I had a few run-ins with some of those vatos [dudes] who didn't like the idea of us seeing each other. It was hard 'cuz I was trying to stay out of la vida [the life], but those vatos [dudes] were leaving me little choice. A couple of times I had to call some camaradas [friends] to come and help handle the situation... a merito me iba pa' lo mismo [I was almost headed in the direction of my previous life]... my jefita [mother] saw me going back to the old ways and she got really pissed off that it was over a girl. She kept telling me that the girl was no good and she was just gonna get me into trouble or dead. After mi ruca [mi girlfriend] got pregnant, I knew my mom wouldn't have nothing to do with it. I also knew that her family wouldn't either. So, I rented a cantón and that's where we live now. It's a little bit hard. Especially when mijo [my son] was first born 'cuz he needed so much attention and other stuff, like leche y pañales [formula and diapers]... we make ends meet, though. She gets WIC and I bring home enough money for us to eat and play. Sometimes, though, it gets hard to study, so I just come to campus and go to the library. Mi ruca [girlfriend], she don't understand about a lot of that... I try to reassure her, but she thinks that eventually me va dar pa' buscar una Chicana [I'll get tempted to find a Chicana]. I try to tell her that half the Chicanas I know you can't tell whether they're Chicanas or chinitas [Asian girls]. She don't buy it though.

RGH: What about your mom? Who's filling your space?

MA: I feel real bad about that. I tried to explain to her that I had to take care of my own. But, she went off on me and told me that mi ruca [my girlfriend] isn't one of my own, and that I turned my back on mi familia and mi gente [my family and my people]. All I can do now is try and make sure that my carnalito [younger brother] is doing his part. And he is. I've already talked to him about next year. You know, he was admitted to the university, too. He's gonna start next year. But I already explained to him that he better not get any stupid ideas about moving on to campus. I also talked to him about the rucas [girls]. He don't need no kids. So, I told him that I would smoke his ass if he got anybody pregnant. He's cool about it. He knows that my hands are tied and that he needs to do what he got to do in order to help la jefita [mother] out.

Both these young men, at one time, represented society's ugliest nightmare and the stereotype of urban, Latino youth that the media perpetuates. They were products of poor single-mother households, involved in sex, violence, drugs and gangs. These two young men were "throwaways" — destined, some would say, to perpetuate the "culture of poverty" that "fatherlessness" produces. While in their teens they have children out of wedlock and, without the moral guidance of a father, they will eventually end up dead or in prison. However, fatherlessness arguments critically underestimate the power and influence that women have over creating and maintaining families alongside the power that poverty has to seriously limit legitimate opportunity. In this case, women were not only responsible for the well-being of their families, they were also responsible for nurturing their sons' sense of masculinity.

Of course the stories of Chava and Miguel Angel chronicle their early trajectory toward death or prison. And, of course, their fathers were absent, very much like the stories of Junior, Beto and Jesús. However, these two young men represent perhaps the poorest families in my study and they were not on the periphery of the informal economy trying to supplement their legitimate livelihood, they were right in the center. The gang literature would interpret their fatherhood as a "life altering" occurrence, one that would motivate them to "go straight," perhaps even provide an opportunity for them to remove themselves from the throes of poverty. But when you look closer, these young men were involved in illegal activity so that they could perform duties normally associated with parenthood

long before they became fathers. Both young men, in their early teens, were helping to provide their mothers with support and stability for their families. Their sense of fatherhood is like the neighborhood in which it was developed — "is not an accident... [it] is a product of systematic sorting" (Furstenburg, et. al., 1999: pp. 18).

When "Chava's mother took off with some vato [dude] to Chicago" his own family network disintegrated. It came at a time when he was facing a particularly difficult situation related to his gang activity. But, Lala marshaled her resources and extended the bounds of her family to him in order to help stabilize his life so that her grandchild would benefit from gaining a sense of not necessarily who her father was, rather a "sense of who her family was." It appears that the same worked for Chava, as he later extended his sense of family to include his daughter's siblings, who were not his children. Interestingly, this woman's insight that allowed her to place more importance on family networks than fatherhood ensured that her other grandchildren would benefit from the fruits of her labor. And that Chava, this new member of her family, would define his role as a father based on his membership in this family network.

The strong women, who forge an existence out of informal work and social networks, and to whom these young men attribute their sense of fatherhood, manhood, masculinity or machismo went to herculean lengths to instill a sense of familism. Whether a heightened sense of familism is a response to structural pressures or a function of culture, and I suspect it is a combination of both, is inconsequential. What is important here is that we see that culturally deterministic arguments about the intrinsic nature of masculinity for Latino men, and its importance to Latino families, are not valid.

Competing Self-Interests

The following portrait was originally intended to give a rich description of the interactions between a young couple and their child. However, the young father played such a tangential role in his child's situation, he consequently never felt the need to even participate in a discussion related to his child, with his child's mother. Instead, what came to life in this interview was a fierce competition between mothers who were both concerned for the well-being of their children.

José and Maria

During the course of volunteering at a neighborhood youth agency, I met both Maria and José under differing circumstances. In fact, it wasn't until I saw them together that I realized that they might be a couple, or at least connected by a common child. This intrigued me the most because they, I had assumed, were from different neighborhoods and had very different backgrounds. I first gravitated toward Maria because she brings her very young child (eight months) to the center with her when she comes in for her GED instruction.

I sometimes tutor Maria in the subjects on which she will be tested. She hopes to take the GED test in November. She is a very bright child and I believe she will do well on the exam. However, her tutoring sessions are usually cut short if there is no available staff member to distract or care for her child so that she can study uninterrupted. When this happens, she usually resigns herself to the fact that her visit will be unproductive, so she either hangs around playing with her child to see if its father will show up, or she leaves to take care of other business. A few times, I've also witnessed her exploit in other ways the fact that someone at the center will watch her child. For example, one day she showed up with her child promptly at 1 p.m. (when the center opens. I happened to be there that day, so she asked me if I would help her with fractions, something she finds particularly hard. She told me that it would be good because she knows I'm "real smart" and Teresa (a staff member) had agreed to take care of her child while I helped her. I agreed, then she asked if she could go to the store to buy a pack of cigarettes and a pop before we got started. Well, she ended up taking off for more than an hour-and-a-half. I became increasingly worried because the neighborhood is kind of rough. But then, I was assured by Teresa that she sometimes does stuff like that because she has no time away from the baby.

Although she gets reprimanded, she continues to do it because some of the staff members will tolerate it to a point.

The next time I was at the center, Maria asked me again if I would help her with studies. I agreed. She was apologetic about what happened the last time, but she told me that she just had to "take care of some business" and she knew I would understand. This lead me to ask very pointed questions about her situation. Specifically, I told her that I know how demanding the responsibilities of having a child are, which lead me to ask whether or not she had much support in terms of her parents or the child's father. Maria took this as a cue to give me her life's story, almost in a way that I felt she may have feared that I judge her harshly for her situation. When I realized this, I assured her that I didn't have any thoughts, good or bad, about the fact that she has a child. I also assured her that I admired her for her tenacity in pursuing her GED, given the extra obstacles that she faces. Consequently, to my relief, she changed considerably the tone of her story. Instead of sounding to me that she was trying to "justify" her situation, she focused more on the obstacles. Here she describes her life, what has lead up to her immediate situation and what she perceives to be her options for the future, even if in the very immediate future. She is clearly distressed and frustrated by how she is stuck in a difficult situation, but she still feels optimistic about her future. Interestingly, even as she clearly vents her frustration, she never once mentioned the possibility of quitting, nor did I get the feeling that she felt sorry for herself.

RGH: Tell me about being a mom while in the foster system.

Maria: I used to be at the Academy for Teen Mothers, but my home provider was a "ho" that had men coming in and out all the time. Besides, it was too dirty in that house for me to be trying to raise my baby. Then one day, a man came in through my window and started going through my stuff while I was asleep on the bed with my baby. That was it. I had enough and I left. But wouldn't you know it? They tried to get me into trouble. They wanted to take away my baby. I was real scared. The good thing was that my caseworker knew how hard I try to be a good mom. So, she found me another home provider, but the catch is that I have to do my GED. That's a good thing because it gives me a good reason to get up and out of the house. The only thing is though, my home provider lives way up there on the west side, so I gotta take three buses to get here and it takes a long time. I'm glad that this place opens at 1 p.m., or else I'd have to be getting' up real early."

RGH: Does your home provider help with caring for your child or does she help you out by taking you places instead of your having to ride the bus all over the place.

Maria: Basically, my home provider just provides a home. Right now, me and her are having some problems. See, I got to get out to the bus stop to catch the 11 o'clock if I'm gonna be here by 1 p.m.. Then if I stay here 'till 4 or 5 o'clock, then I'm not gonna get home 'till, sometimes, after 9 p.m. She don't want me comin' home no later than 6 p.m. I try to explain to her that it takes so long to ride the busses, but does she listen? No. She just keeps tellin' me that I should be there all the time, so I can spend time with her daughter. Man, I'm 17 years old and have a baby. What do I got in common with a 14-year-old? Nothin', that's what. She's always tryin' to be my mom. Like right now, she's real pissed at me because the other night, after GED I rode the bus to Jose's house to drop off the baby. I stayed for a little while and I fell asleep. I woke up about 10 p.m., but I was too tired to ride the bus home, so I just stayed the night at a friend's house. I called her and left a message, but she still got real mad. She called my caseworker talkin' about 'I just wanna follow my own rules and I just wanna think that I'm grown and don't have to answer to anybody.' Now, she told my caseworker that if I want to stay with her that I'm gonna have to be home directly after GED. She called it 'house arrest'. Like I'm supposed to do that. She ain't my momma. She's crazy. Don't she know that I'm only 17 years old and I gotta get out to have some fun, too. What does she care where I'm at as long as I have my baby?

RGH: How about José? Does he help you?

Maria: José??? He wants to be involved in the baby's life. I mean, he comes here a lot so that he can get close to the baby. At least that's what he tells me. To me, it seems like he might be coming around here so much because of that Dominican. You know her. She's the one with the body that acts like she don't notice all these punks drooling about her, just 'cuz she don't speak English. It don't bother me, though, because soon enough she'll listen to someone for too long and end up pregnant, just like me. Then where's that body gonna be? I just hope it's not Jose that knocks her up. I don't wanna' be getting in no fights over fathering time... I mean, she can have him, as long as it don't interfere with me or my child.

RGH: Does he help you, though?

Maria: He'll take the baby, even overnight, once in a while. The problem is that he ain't got no ride, so I gotta take the baby on the bus to his house and drop him off, then go pick him up. You know, his family loves the baby, but they hate me. His mom told him to get a paternity test. And he's the only one I been with, but she said that I'm such a 'ho,' just like my mom, that I probably don't know who the father is and I was just trying to mess up his life because he comes from a good family... Yeah, and she don't want me and him seeing each other, but she still wants to see the baby. So, when I drop the baby off, I can't come in the house or anything if his mom's home. Sometimes it's worth it though because when I do drop him off, then I got time to myself.

RGH: You know, winter's just around the corner. What are you gonna do when it's snowing out? You can't have your baby outside for such a long period of time.

Maria: I don't know what I'm gonna do. That's why I'm killin' myself to pass this test by November. I figure that after I pass the test, I can go out and get a job, even if it's at McDonald's. I'll only need to do it 'till I'm 18 and can move out on my own. By that time, hopefully, I can get myself together. My caseworker said that she'll help me find a job and daycare. Maybe I can buy a car. These busses are killing me. If I can get a car, then I can get a job and maybe me and my baby can have a better life.

I set a subsequent appointment to interview both Maria and José. Maria was 20 minutes late and seemed a bit embarrassed that she had totally forgotten about our appointment. She told me that she was sorry that she had forgotten about it because if she had remembered, she wouldn't have gotten into a fight with José's mom over the weekend. She said that she was convinced that José wasn't going to show. He didn't.

Maria: Sorry I'm late. You know, that old witch [José's mom] is always messin' with me. I can't stand her. José had agreed to take the baby this Saturday. I went all the way over there. Took three busses. And wouldn't you know it? He wasn't even home. His mom told me just to leave the baby and I could come back to get him on Sunday morning. You know, I didn't feel right about leaving him 'cuz Jose wasn't there. I mean, I don't think that anybody in that house would hurt him, but I came all the way to drop him off to José. The least he could do is be there. Then, I made the mistake of askin'... where he was and she jumped all over me. She told me that it wasn't any of my business and I shouldn't concern myself with his whereabouts. Well, that did it. I told her that she was crazy if she thought I was gonna leave the baby there, now. When I said that, all of a sudden she got real nice and started telling me that she had a hard night and that she had been working all night and she didn't know why she snapped at me like that. Anyways, then she invited me in and I didn't trust her but I had already made plans to be somewhere, so I decided that if she wanted to be friendly, I would take advantage of it. She ain't always real friendly with me, you know? So we sat down and she made me a cup of coffee 'cuz she said she had been meaning to talk to me anyways and now was as good a' time as any.

RGH: What did she say?

Maria: I just sat and listened. She started tellin' me how she worried for the baby's safety sometimes 'cuz I gotta take her all over the place on the bus. And, she knows how hard it is for me and she doesn't want me to think that she doesn't like me. But, I wasn't believing none of it. I know she hates me. Yeah, she told me how they had such high hopes

for José. They scrimped and saved all the time just to be able to send him to Catholic school so that he wouldn't have to be around the "elements" in the regular schools. Then she told me how disappointed she was that I got pregnant because she thought that Jose would put off going to college like everybody wanted him to. Even though José wanted to stay around on that Saturday to be with the baby, that old witch convinced him to go to a college day with the rest of the kids on his track team. Yeah, she told me how she thought it would be the best thing for the baby if I just left him [José] alone so that he could go to college and become somebody. You know, for a second there I started to really believe all of it, but then she started tellin' me how if I really wanted to do something with myself then maybe I should think about givin' the baby to her to raise. That did it man. I told her that for one thing, I didn't just 'get pregnant,' José 'got me pregnant.' And yeah, even though I didn't have no parents or didn't go to no Catholic school, I still had dreams about being someone, too. And another thing, I wouldn't have to be takin' no busses all over if he would take some of the responsibilities. Who does she think she is? She ain't takin' my baby. What she needs to do is quit treatin' José like a baby so that he can take care of his business. Yeah, I ended up not leaving the baby and I just went back home. Then the stupid idiot's gonna call me four hours later, after I take three busses to get back home, and tell me why don't I come and drop her off now. I just laughed and hung up the phone. So anyways, I'm sorry if I ruined your chance at talkin' to the both of us, but it wasn't really my fault.

RGH: Would you consider taking help from José's mother if she were to offer it within reasonable terms?

Maria: Sure. But I ain't givin' up my baby. Right now, I'm feelin' like I'm doing all this extra work and I'm goin' really far out of my way so that José can be involved with the baby. But, I'm starting to see that it's just not worth it. The way it is right now, I only do it 'cuz I ain't got no money for no babysitter and there really ain't nowhere else I can go. But as soon as I can afford to leave the baby some place else, I can't see traveling all that way on the bus. It's just not worth it. Just once... just once, I would love it for them to come and pick her [the baby] up. But they got two cars in that family, and they ain't even offered. It's almost like they want me to fail so that they can take the baby.

Even in the poorest neighborhoods, what little opportunities and privilege that are available to people are unevenly distributed (Furstenburg, et. al., 1999; Newman, 1999). Families perceived to be "better off" financially and circumstantially are also perceived to be ferocious protectors of their resources (Anderson, 1999. Sometimes, as families and children interact, it pits the interest of families against those of others. José and Maria represent a couple that clearly occupies different substrata within the same neighborhood. Maria did not enjoy the same benefits afforded José through his family network. She never met her father. She says that she believes that he's either dead or in prison. Her mother was a "tecata" [heroin junky] and subsequently ended up incarcerated when she (Maria) was about 10 years old. Immediately after that, she stayed with her mother's sister, but she was "all messed up, too." So, she has been shuffled between foster homes since she was 11 years old.

When she was 16, she became pregnant, and so her foster family "got rid of her." Since she had been in constant trouble for truancy and delinquency, she had few options. So, her caseworker put her in contact with what she called a "home provider." From what I could gather, it wasn't much more than a foster home that agreed to take her child as well. What is crystal clear from this story is that Maria had few legitimate opportunities in life before her pregnancy and little had changed because of it. What is also clear is that José's chances for going to school were good before the birth of his child and they had hardly changed, either.

By middle class standards José's family would hardly be considered privileged. However, his mother brandished considerable power because she controlled membership in her family network, which constituted a fair amount of access to resources — one of which was fatherhood. Although she was clearly accepting of her grandchild, she would not

extend her family to the child's mother the way Lala chose to extend her familial resources to Chava. Of course, Lala's family network eventually enjoyed the payout of that investment. Lala had four daughters, many grandchildren and no men to help out. What she received in return was not only Chava, but also his grandmother and her resources. But, for all practical purposes, Maria is alone in this world. José's mother sees extending her resources to Maria as a detriment — with no real return on her investment. She discourages José from making good on his parental responsibilities for fear that it will hamper his future and what her family has invested in it. Instead she offers to "take care of José's business" meanwhile José gets on with the business of "becoming somebody."

Maria says she is "goin' really far out of my way so that José can be involved with the baby." However, regardless of how far she travels and how many buses she takes so her baby can spend time with José, José is not the one with whom she is negotiating for a bit of fatherhood for her child. Fatherhood is at such a premium in these neighborhoods that José's mother is able to negotiate her son's potential masculinity without compromising her family or extending it to Maria.

Maria's only asset to barter with for a small piece of family life is her baby, and she will not give her up. She is her family. And, while she has not yet been able to negotiate successfully José's presence in her child's life on her terms, she is protective, nonetheless, of the of the potential resources, for her child, that José represents. She says it best when confronted by the possibility of José may father another child. "I don't wanna' be getting in no fights over fathering time... I mean, she can have him, as long as it don't interfere with me or my child."

Maria's story is sad commentary on poverty, youth and single motherhood. Along with the other mothers, twice and three times her age and represented in these family stories, Maria shows superhuman resolve and strength in her pursuit of providing a stable and loving environment for her child. She is hardly the "perpetual welfare mom who irresponsibly gets pregnant in order to 'get over' on taxpayer's hard earned money." Similar to her male counterparts in this study, she has aspirations for a future that include an education, without compromising her role as a parent. In fact, also similar to some of her male counterparts, she is going to great lengths to "take care of her business," something, I suppose Mirandé would call machismo. I'm sure that she will instill in her son the importance of family that these experiences are teaching her, and along the way, how to "be a man" and "take care of his business," what Hawkins and Dollahite (1997) would call fatherwork.

Strategies of Exploiting Local Resources

All of these young men (and women) had aspirations that included education, better jobs, meaningful relationships and stability for their families, but those aspirations were tempered by the reality of the obstacles that they faced on a daily basis. The obstacles included their responsibilities to contribute to extended families, to their children and strained relations between their families and the families of their children. These obstacles were complicated by the increasingly fewer legitimate ways to earn a living. Although the odds seem against it, all of my informants saw their situations to be temporary. They were very motivated by what they perceived "good" fatherhood — taking care of business — to find ways that would allow them to meet their families' current needs while trying to attend to a more stable future.

In the Midwest, urban Chicano youth, whose grandfathers were lured to settle from agrarian economies by stable employment in the auto industry (Baba & Abonyi, 1979), around which they built and maintained families, and reinvented masculinity and fatherhood, watch as their fathers struggle to cope with the changing structure of our economy, and not be able to meet the standards that their own fathers set for maintaining families. Chicano teen fathers, with few legitimate resources, opportunities and experience, struggle to fill the "institutional gap" created by this scenario. And while I agree with Cohen's (1999) assertion that we are experiencing a "qualitative shift in the code of manhood," I challenge the notion that it is because

fatherhood represents an alternative to "street culture." Where there are none to begin with, legitimate opportunities do not simply materialize when a young man becomes a father, meets a "good girl," or miraculously receives a letter from MIT celebrating his good showing at an inferior school by inviting him to participate in college night (pardon my cynicism).

In urban barrios, there are increasingly few alternatives to "street culture." As is evidenced by the portraits of Maria, Chava, Beto, Junior, Jesús and Miguel Angel, "hustling" is not the specific domain of violent and depraved street criminals. Even after Chava and Miguel Angel became "law abiding family men," they were still "hustling" to the extent that their family needs demanded. While one cannot condone their involvement in selling illegal drugs for obvious reasons, it is clear that their "hustling" is much more complex than simple juvenile delinquency that is most often associated with inner city youth, perhaps "fatherlessness," and deemed immoral. Ironically, "hustling" may be one of the only means, whether immoral or not, by which these youths may strive to achieve the moral standards set by family values stalwarts, a stable family.

In an important sense, the underground economy (hustling) is what is providing these communities with stability (Newman, 1999; Stepick, 1998). And, if Baca Zinn's (1995) suggestion that familism, for Latinos, is more a response to structural forces than a cultural relic, and I suspect she's right, then as poor families struggle to maintain stability, they will be drawn more and more toward this underground economy, where a family's configuration is far from dependent on the role of a traditional father. Rather, the maintenance, management and stability of family and gender is not only the responsibility of everyone involved, it is vitally dependent on their collective efforts — even supporting and thereby helping to construct the meaning and roles of young fathers. As the structure of legitimate opportunity continues to crumble in these urban barrios, it is precisely around "street culture" that young fathers and their families are reinventing the meaning of fatherhood — plugging that institutional gap. Perhaps this is a "qualitative shift in the code of manhood," one that is precariously perched on the margins of our society. Furthermore, while these data support Cohen's (1999) assertions that there is increasingly less respect in barrios for young men who disregard their parental responsibilities, they hardly show that fatherhood causes young men drastically to change their lifestyles.

Summary and Conclusion

Using structural analysis to inform the generative fathering conceptual framework as an approach for exploring Chicano teen fatherhood within the context of family systems, from an insider's perspective, produced considerable insight into how contemporary, urban Chicano families stretch and strain themselves to adapt to changing conditions. The assumptions that generative fathering brings to the field of family studies have proven to be an extremely valuable concept from which to approach young fatherhood within Chicano communities. It revealed the complicated process that young men undertake to translate their desires to be good fathers into effective fatherwork. It also showed that despite the non-traditional ways that these young men do fatherwork, it is important to their children and families, and it is a culturally unique response to the conditions of their social environment

It also shed light on the ambiguous and changing nature of manhood and fatherhood; extremely convoluted power/gender relations; how indistinct the boundaries between different positions may be within families. And, it allowed for the collection of very rich data pertinent to those boundaries.

Four implications that this analysis produced are salient. First, not all teen fathers are a negligible quantity in the lives of their children. Some do contribute meaningfully and dutifully to their children's lives. The amount, meaning and impact of those contributions are easily overlooked when fatherhood is narrowly defined as a role that exists within the context of a heterosexual marriage. However, by slightly changing our perspective from one that overlooks or demoralizes these contributions to one that validates the fact that young men can, and do, do work associated with

fatherhood, these contributions summarily come to light. It seems obvious that new frameworks are needed that demarginalizes the ways in which non-White, poor and teenage fathers fit into the paradigm of family studies.

Second, fatherhood for these young men is not merely a biological occurrence. Rather, it is a complex process that is shaped by these young men's ability to interpret and modify the perceptions of fatherhood that they construct through social interactions with their families, children, peers and institutions, which in turn helps to shape and to determine how, and how much, fatherwork they do. And, the fatherwork that they do is related to the structure of legitimate opportunity and family networks. Despite witnessing the disintegration of a means by which their fathers and grandfathers created a sense of manhood around the support and maintenance of families, all the young fathers in this study expressed desire to participate financially and emotionally in their child's life. Given many social, institutional and circumstantial barriers, these fathers went to great lengths to recreate a sense of manhood and fatherhood — take care of business — whose foundation rested on their ability to exploit the informal market — "hustle." However, the importance of their "hustle" preceded their fatherhood in that their obligation to their sanguinal family networks demanded that they help to extract stability from an environment that offered little. In other words, they "hustled" to "take care of family business" long before they became fathers. In exchange, these powerful family networks most often were the single most important resource in determining whether the barriers to their ability to create a sense of fatherhood could be successfully negotiated. However, the social exchange between families was not an easy process given that the competition was stiff for limited resources, and resources were not easily surrendered once attained.

Third, in the face of much emphasis given to assumptions about patriarchy and traditional gender roles that supposedly distinguish Latino families, the mothers in this study played pivotal roles in determining and facilitating father participation in many important ways. They helped to define the ambiguous nature of their sons' new roles as fathers, especially in cases where their sons had no meaningful and/or positive relationships with their own fathers. They created powerful social networks that facilitated, discouraged, or substituted the involvement of their sons in the lives of their own children. In all cases here, mothers had the ultimate power to restrict or grant their ex-boyfriend, ex-husband or ex-son access to their children.

Fourth, the fathers in this study could not by any standard be described as "altar boys." However, to describe them as irresponsible, incorrigible, highly oversexed, sometimes depraved, boys or men who derive their self worth from irresponsibly fathering as many children as possible, and who have no regard for society's existing mores for civility — "hit and run experts," immoral, products of and responsible for "fatherless America" — is also wrong. These young men all had a desire to be involved with their children in meaningful ways; they made many important and valuable contributions to the lives of their children and families; and those contributions are best understood within cultural and structural contexts. In spite of infidelity, living away from their children, having limited access to educational and employment opportunities, the opposite of characteristics that critics use to distinguish good fathers, these fathers engage in fatherwork that is a productive, cultural response to structural forces.

In conclusion, some of these stories represent extreme circumstances, marked by poverty, crime, violence, drug abuse and lack of educational, health and employment resources. These conditions are not endemic to Chicano or Latino communities. They are, however, increasingly part of the landscape of urban centers that have been hardest hit by a restructuring economy in the industrial Midwest. These urban centers are the environment with which most Chicano and Latino teen parents have to learn to cope in order to carve out their own existence, let alone one for their children. To be sure, these

structural conditions have great bearing on teenagers' immediate lives and futures, regardless of premature parenthood. The teenage fathers in this study all had varying conceptions of what their obligations were to their children. However, considering the substantial barriers present in their environment, that they had any sense of obligation at all, is admirable. And, the extent to which some of these young men and their families went to establish and maintain family relations, is downright remarkable.

Finally, while my data set is small, it is very rich. Unfortunately, these stories had to be condensed. However, I intentionally created and inserted tedious "dialogues" of these people so that their situations, actions and reactions would be understood from the context of their lives' experiences. I am sure others would interpret these data differently; please do. However, these data are not meant to be generalized, nor are they to represent all, or even all Chicano, teen fathers. These stories represent the struggles of urban Mexican American families in the Midwest, where neighborhoods built on industry are approaching a century of precarious existence but are still growing through reproduction and immigration as I write.

Endnotes

1 This study was also slightly influenced by the three sociological premise on which Herbert Blumer bases symbolic interactionism (Winton, 1995), and they are: 1) "...human beings act toward things on the basis of the meanings that things have for them"; 2) "...the meaning of such things is derived from, or arises out of, the social interaction one has with one's fellows"; and 3) "...these meanings are handled in, and modified through, an interpretive process used by the person in dealing with the things he encounters Wellman (1993; pp. 85."

2 Poor women, women of color and working-class women have always had to participate in productive labor, that middle- and upper-class women have also participated in work outside the home, and that men have benefited by encouraging women not to do productive labor because it raises men's wages by decreasing competition, and it gives men leverage over women in romantic and marital relationships (Coltrane, 1996.

3 Former president of the National Fatherhood Institute and author of several articles and other literature attacking single mothers, non-married fathers and feminist arguments that he presents as misandronistic and anti-family.

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Fatherhood in the Crossfire: Chicano Teen Fathers Struggling to "Take Care of Business"

by **Rudy Hernandez**
Michigan State University

Working Paper No. 58
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Abstract:

Increased divorce rates and out-of-wedlock births have precipitated much national conversation about the well-being of children raised in single family households. Commonly evoked is the image of a single mother who is struggling to raise children without the help of her children's biological father, or a "deadbeat dad." However, realistically, she has a good chance of remarrying a man whose ex-wife and children are being primarily supported and raised by yet another man (Coleman, Ganong & Fine, 2000). If the mother is poor and young, the image quickly becomes that of a Black or brown woman who is perpetuating her condition by irresponsibly becoming pregnant repeatedly, by multiple men, most often in her teens, without regard or need for establishing a traditional family; she is replacing familial support: economic, social, emotional and psychological, with that of the state. The Black or brown father(s) are seen as irresponsible, incorrigible, highly oversexed, sometimes depraved, boys or men who derive their self worth from irresponsibly fathering as many children as possible and who have no regard for society's existing mores for civility.

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